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Dear Shel Silverstein,

"And the tree was happy." I think that line whenever anything happens to me that I feel happy or grateful for. Your book, The Giving Tree, had a lasting effect on me. While the message that I got from was probably not intended, it had a lasting effect on me

When I was about 5, I found your book in my school library. When I finished it I insisted that my parents buy it for me. My parents wanted to make sure I really wanted it, and asked me if I could wait for Santa. I need to mention that as a little five year old, I never really provoked an argument with my parents. I hated arguments and yelling, pretty much any type of controversy for that matter. This time, I put my foot down. I refused to wait until Christmas, so my mom and I bought it at the bookstore. I read it every day, and if I hadn't gotten a chance to read it that day, I would read it at night, with a flash light. I actually preferred doing that, because I would dream about it.

In sixth grade, I made a lot more friends than I had in elementary school. It was fun, having a wide circle of friends. Sometime in the middle of the year, something happened. I think I did something that might've made my best friend mad at me. My best friend started acting distant; she stopped laughing when I said something funny, just kind of smiled tightly. Lunch felt like a battle to be acknowledged, plenty of times I would say something, just to be ignored by her. I was hurt, hurt because I wanted my best friend back, and she was sending a silent, not-so-subtle message: *No*.

This continued to seventh grade. I had hoped it would be better, that she would forget, but she didn't. I started changing myself, wearing different clothes, changing my sense of humor, the way I did my hair, my whole personality for her and her friends. Lunch was still the same, but this time, I had an option to sit with some other friends. I didn't, and still sat with my old best friend and her friends. They never really were mean to me; I just felt like I didn't belong there.

One day, after a particularly horrible day at school, I saw your book still sitting on my dresser. I picked it up, flopped on my bed, and flipped through it again. Then it hit me. *I* was the tree, and my "friend" was the boy. I was changing myself for her, giving her my apples, leaves, branches, and even my trunk. Now I realized that most young kids saw themselves as the, young, carefree curious boy, I sympathized with the tree. I used to be the boy, carefree and happy, but I had changed. I even came up with metaphors for it, the tree's apples were my sense of humor, the leaves were the things I wore, the branches were the way I acted, and the trunk was *me*. I realized that if I didn't stop, I'd end up just like that tree: a stump. While the tree may have been happy with this fate, I certainly wasn't.

The next day I wore the clothes *I* liked, did my hair the way *I* wanted to, I was me again. I even sat with my other, real, friends. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I actually smiled, and I *really* laughed for the first time in ages. I was happy again. One last thing: the other day, one of my friends said, "If everyone at the other lunch tables is more popular than us, doesn't that make us losers?" "If we're losers, then we're the happiest losers in the school." I said, and I meant it. She laughed, and one line flashed into my head. "And the tree was *very* happy."

Sincerely,

Ruthie